

Corrected Version 9:14 PM

Easley Op/Ed 8/24/01

Your legislators face a critical vote next week that will determine whether North Carolina takes a giant leap forward or a costly step backward in education. School has begun for the 1.3 million children and the 82,150 teachers in our state's public schools. Yet, the legislature has not passed a permanent state budget appropriating any money to pay for the education of our children

What's worse is that some legislators want to reduce the amount spent on our public schools by at least \$250 million. That deep a cut could result in the elimination of 4,300 teachers and could increase every K-12 class in the state by at least two more students.

The reckless cutting of education is simply unacceptable. I have been visiting classrooms throughout our state, and I have seen far too many with 25 or more students per class and packed into trailers. Our children deserve more than an overcrowded classroom and an underpaid, overworked teacher.

So your legislators face a critical choice next week regarding the state budget. They can either vote to break our commitment to public education, or choose to keep our commitment to our children and our state.

They can pass a progressive and fiscally responsible plan that makes immediate, vital investments in our children and our schools. This would give teachers a salary increase - plus promised performance bonuses - and allow us to reduce class sizes.

The alternative proposal: no teacher performance bonuses (that have been earned), the layoff of thousands of teachers, and crowded classrooms throughout the state.

The choice is that simple.

Our system of public school accountability has become a model for the rest of the nation. Recently, we learned that our students are making the greatest gains nationwide in math. We now lead the Southeast. For the first time in our history, North Carolina is becoming the yardstick by which the rest of America measures improvements in their public schools.